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NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

**ANWAR SADAT AND THE 1973 OCTOBER WAR**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Arab-Israeli War of 1973, also known as the “October War” was the result of, and arguably a continuation of, a long-standing conflict between Arabs and Jews. Prior wars between the Arabs and Jews were fought in 1948, 1956, and more importantly, in 1967. The outcome of the “Six-Day War” of 1967 created an overwhelming feeling of hostility toward Israel by the Arab nations, particularly by the people of Egypt, who felt humiliated and dishonored.<sup>1</sup> Honor is an important part of the Egyptian culture, lying at the core of their self-identity, thereby reflecting and influencing vociferous public opinion and national passion. The influence of Egyptian nationalism was made evident in a 1972 speech when President Sadat told the Egyptians that “a battle of destiny” would be waged against Israel to reclaim the land lost by Egypt to Israel in 1967.<sup>2</sup> This essay will study how Egyptian nationalism affected the elements of statecraft, and how it weighed on the final decision to use military force against Israel.

President Sadat possessed a keen awareness of the interplay of the government, the people and the military power—its volatility and synergy. Unfortunately, the world underestimated the salience of Egypt’s cultural belief in preservation of honor. This brief analysis of both Egyptian domestic conditions and international relationships preceding the 1973 war exemplifies the significant role culture contributes to and influences statecraft and the relations of nations.

## **BACKGROUND**

Although the violent history of this fluid region began more than two thousand years

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<sup>1</sup> Bard E. O’Neill, “The October War: A Political-Military Assessment,” *Air University Review* 25 (July-August 1974) 28

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 27

ago, the analysis will begin in May 1948 when the state of Israel was established. Shortly thereafter, armies from the region, with the goal of assisting the Arabs, attacked Israel and were ultimately defeated. The area was divided with Egypt taking control of the Gaza Strip, and Jordan's occupation of the West Bank of the Jordan River. The result was disarray, as the Palestinians were thrown into their own Diaspora throughout the region. The hostilities in the area intensified, resulting in regional wars in 1956 and 1967.

During the "Six Day War" of 1967, Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the Sinai Peninsula (including the Suez Canal), and Gaza Strip from Egypt. As a result of the Israeli occupation of these territories, the United Nations adopted a resolution calling for Israel to withdraw from the newly occupied territories in exchange for Arab recognition of the state of Israel. The resolution failed to resolve the regional competition. Israel made several conditional offers to Egypt, however they were not accepted. Skirmishes between the two countries continued for the next few years, and the battle cry from the Egyptian people grew louder during each successive year.

### **DEVELOPING STRATEGY/THE PROBLEMS FACED BY SADAT**

In 1970, when President Sadat "inherited" the circumstances surrounding the conflict between Egypt and Israel, he concluded that the only way it would be resolved was through a violent confrontation with Israel.<sup>3</sup> He based this assumption on the troubled history of these two nations, and the rising tide of hatred of the Israelis by the Egyptians.<sup>4</sup> In outlining his strategy, he clearly stated what his political aim should be: "to prepare the

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<sup>3</sup> The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, "Sadat Decides On War," Chapter 3 in *The Yom Kippur War* (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1974) 46

armed forces to secure the land in an offensive operation that would break the political stalemate.”<sup>5</sup>

Because Israel had superior military strength (supplied by the United States with modern offensive weaponry), President Sadat knew Egypt was not capable of defeating Israel in yet another symmetrical and protracted military confrontation, contrary to the hopes of his people. In the ensuing years, President Sadat tried a variety of ways to avoid a war, and at the same time, he sought to appease his people, who were driven to restore their honor.

What were the ways and means that could be used by Sadat? President Sadat fully realized that his key asset was the latent power of his people—their passion. His calculus included the talent, numbers, and more significantly, the desire of the people to engage its superior military opponent. This also caused him a problem of time and timing; in that he had to restrain—and at the same time maintain—Egypt’s will to fight until all other elements of his strategy, including the building of sufficient military strength, had been fully addressed.

To preclude a premature conflict or to preempt war altogether, Sadat’s statecraft included: diplomacy and negotiations through engagement of the international community; economic pressure, coalition building; and, a continuous internal dialogue with his people. Many of these efforts were effectively interwoven throughout the process leading to October 6, 1973. Unfortunately, Sadat’s political activities to recover lost territory were inconclusive short of armed conflict.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 48

<sup>5</sup> Hassan El Badri, Taha El Magdoub, and Mohammed Dia El Din Zohdy, “Decision and Concept,” in *The Ramadan War, 1973* (Dunn Loring, Va.: T.N. Dupuy Associates, Inc., 1978) 16,17

## PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

President Sadat used indirect, psychological tactics as part of his efforts. He exploited the controversy in the Israeli government over its occupation of the formerly Arab territories. He also sought to leverage Israel's caution when placing its forces in harm's way due to its high value on life. Sadat's public saber rattling compounded Israel's domestic turmoil by leading Israel to believe Egypt was willing to wage another war of attrition. These psychological ploys against Israel also transitioned into economic warfare. For example, in 1973, Egypt's various military "training" evolutions—with ample media coverage—persuaded Israel that an attack was imminent. While Egyptian forces gathered at the Canal, Israeli troops were put on alert through costly and wearying mobilization, always at great expense to the Israeli government. Each time this occurred, the psychological effect on Israeli civilian and military infrastructure increased—taking a cumulative toll, leading to what Dr. Henry Kissinger called an intellectual breakdown. Although Sadat later claimed the constant rallying of troops was part of his strategy, it may have been an indirect result of his own government's inability to decide when it was prepared to initiate hostilities. Whether it was due to rational intent and deception or due to chance and probability, the psychological and economic strains had a detrimental, draining and dulling effect on Israel.<sup>6</sup>

## GAINING SUPPORT IN THE REGION

Knowing Egypt could not successfully fight Israel alone, President Sadat sought to unite the Arab countries to fight Israel. Sadat later said "Thus it was God's will that I should have close personal relations with the leaders of the Arab world. We should be

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Kissinger, "Why We Were Surprised," *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982) 466; Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 241, 242

committed to one thing only—our Arab character, pure and simple.”<sup>7</sup> In order to accomplish his objectives, Sadat had to somehow unify the Arabs, (particularly Syria), balance their interests with those of the Egyptians, and pacify his people while he acquired the necessary military strength to fight another war. Sadat successfully built a consensus of nearly all of the Arab nations against Israel, with Egypt and Syria eventually agreeing to enter into a war with Israel. Their primary goal was to reclaim the Arab territories taken by Israel in 1967, thus bringing Israel back to the negotiating table. If this goal were met, he would have succeeded in re-establishing Arab, and more importantly, Egyptian honor, the driving force behind the 1973 war. On October 6, 1973, President Assad of Syria echoed the call from Egypt when he rallied his people, and more importantly, all Arabs, through a radio broadcast stating, “this is the battle of honor and dignity.”<sup>8</sup>

### **GAINING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT**

In order to parlay his regional initiatives into global bargaining power, Sadat turned to international organizations. For example, he spoke before the Organization of African Unity, and the United Nations (UN), thereby orchestrating precious public resolutions against Israel.<sup>9</sup> At the outset of The October War, Sadat had generated public backing from more than 100 countries. President Sadat’s aggressive coalition building efforts among the Arab states ultimately limited the oil supply to the U.S. and other countries, causing an oil crisis throughout the world. This indirect use of force through the international community eventually awakened and mobilized world attention.

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<sup>7</sup> Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 241, 242

<sup>8</sup> Bard E. O’Neill, “The October War: A Political-Military Assessment,” *Air University Review* 25 (July-August 1974) 32



Essentially, President Sadat played a central role in limiting the oil supply to the world's superpowers in order to coerce countries (particularly the U.S.), to intervene with Israel on his behalf.

Since the United States failed to assist in forcing Israel from the occupied territories, the Arab nations next intended to expose U.S. interests in the Arab world to danger.<sup>10</sup> In other words, the Arab nations wanted a balance of power in the region. If the U.S. would not become a dominate mediator, the Arab alliance would coerce it through military force against Israel.

### **APPROACHING THE SUPER POWERS**

Knowing that his attempts at direct diplomacy with Israel continued to fail without outside intervention, Sadat continuously used the international arena to pressure Israel to concede the territories. As time passed, Sadat concluded ruefully that the U.S., and the world, did not believe he would wage another war with Israel, because Israel had superior military power and heretofore exceptional military leadership. They were wrong.<sup>11</sup>

Recognizing that the U.S. had strong ties to Israel, often supplying them with military equipment, Sadat believed his best chance toward resolution was through the assistance of the U.S. However, since the U.S. failed to intervene on Egypt's behalf, Sadat intensified his efforts for military assistance from the U.S.S.R.

Sadat felt a strong commitment to independence, however he was wise enough to realize he needed a super-power to supply him with military equipment to counter the U.S. military aid to Israel. Sadat did not want to rely on the Soviet Union for manpower,

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<sup>9</sup> Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 240

<sup>10</sup> Hassan El Badri, Taha El Magdoub, and Mohammed Dia El Din Zohdy, "Decision and Concept," in *The Ramadan War, 1973* (Dunn Loring, Va.: T.N. Dupuy Associates, Inc., 1978) 17

<sup>11</sup> Henry Kissinger, "Why We Were Surprised," *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982) 459

however he needed their military equipment, and more importantly, the appearance of an alliance with them to continue with his strategy of getting the U.S. to put pressure on Israel to relinquish the territories. Despite their promises to Sadat, the Soviets eventually cited *détente* as the reason for their lack of offensive military support to the Egyptians.<sup>12</sup>

Due to growing hostility in his country, and repeated unfulfilled promises from the Soviets to provide him with offensive weapons, Sadat finally expelled the Soviet advisors from Egypt—thereby altering the balance of power in the region. Hence, many believed he was backing down because he would not fight Israel without Soviet assistance. Once again, the world miscalculated the will and determination of the Egyptians.

The situation caused a dilemma for all of those involved. If the Soviets provided arms to Egypt, and a war erupted, the U.S. would certainly enter the fight, thus risking a war between the two super-powers. That was something the Soviets were not interested in doing. On the other hand, if the Soviets didn't provide offensive weapons to Egypt, and the Egyptians lost another war to Israel, the Soviets would permanently lose their presence and prestige in the region. Perhaps not entirely of Sadat's making, Sadat successfully used this "horns of a dilemma" to his advantage, knowing that his best bet at attaining his objectives was through the assistance of the U.S., not the Soviets. In his mind, the U.S. also stood to gain from this situation—a mutually beneficial consequence in the interests of both nations.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, this effort paid off for Egypt, but not without armed conflict as a pursuit of political objectives.

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<sup>12</sup> The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, "Sadat Decides On War," Chapter 3 in *The Yom Kippur War* (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1974) 51, 52, 59

<sup>13</sup> The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, "Sadat Decides On War," Chapter 3 in *The Yom Kippur War* (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1974) 54-56, 58

One could argue that Sadat's most masterful attempt at a peaceful resolution was through his efforts in dealing with the super powers. Unfortunately, few took his words, or Egyptian nationalism seriously. In the words of Dr. Henry Kissinger, "Sadat boldly all but told us what he was going to do and we did not believe him. He overwhelmed us with information and let us draw the wrong conclusion. October 6 was the culmination of a failure of political analysis on the part of its victims."<sup>14</sup>

### **PREPARING EGYPT FOR WAR**

President Sadat considered himself to be a patient and peaceful man who was "always on the side of justice."<sup>15</sup> However, he took office in 1970 believing strongly he would lead a military effort against Israel because they would not agree to Egypt's demands through diplomacy. Observing—and feeding—the growing impatience of the Egyptian people, President Sadat constantly apprised them of the progress toward inevitable combat readiness. Although it would have been extremely precarious to share the details of his overall plan with his people (to his benefit), he maintained their trust through regular addresses to the People's Assembly.

Committed to the restoration of Egyptian honor and dignity, Sadat called 1971 the "year of decision." It appears as though Sadat was really not ready for war in 1971. Therefore, in order to continue with his own strategy of using every means possible before resorting to war, he cleverly traded provocative statements for more time to achieve military credibility and readiness. This strategy prompted a great deal of difficulty for Sadat as the passion of his people caused political unrest in his country, and some challenged his

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<sup>14</sup> Henry Kissinger, "Why We Were Surprised," *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982) 459

<sup>15</sup> Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 239

rule.<sup>16</sup> Despite limited unrest, there was continued homage to his leadership, which kept his country united while he pursued diplomatic means to recover lost territory. The constant state of military readiness in Egypt not only served to unite his people and build their confidence, but it strengthened their resolve against Israel.<sup>17</sup>

However, the constant preparation for offensive actions by the Egyptians had a negative effect on their economy. Preparations for war and a modicum of modernization to Egypt's military were indeed costly. Regardless of his alliance with his neighbors, Sadat told his people he would not ask for loans from other Arabs, because they were insistent that the Egyptians retake the controlled territories, particularly the Suez Canal, which had been a major source of income for the Arab states. This impact on the Egyptian economy played an important part in the final decision to go to war in October 1973, because Sadat understood that in addition to the public outcry for a war, the economy could no longer support his other efforts at resolving the issues.<sup>18</sup>

Once the date for war was decided, President Sadat convened his National Defense Council on September 30, 1973. After his military commander briefed them, Sadat told the Council the time had come for war. All other options had been tried and failed. Sadat informed the Council that his goal was to wage a limited war against Israel, hoping the action would force them to negotiate a settlement. To prolong the inevitable, would only cause him, and the Egyptians to lose credibility and continue to suffer economically.

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<sup>16</sup> The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, "Sadat Decides On War," Chapter 3 in *The Yom Kippur War* (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1974) 48

<sup>17</sup> Major-General A.H. Farrar-Hockley, "The October War," (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1993) 15

<sup>18</sup> Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 239 Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 245

On October 1, 1973 President Sadat addressed a war order to his military commander, outlining his intentions, strategy, the enemy strategy, as well as his justification for taking offensive action. The political and military objectives were clear. Egypt was fighting to restore their honor, and would wage a limited war to regain their territories from Israel.

On October 5, 1973, Sadat issued another, more direct order “for the sake of history.” He emphasized that “this is not an invasion, we are freeing the land.”<sup>19</sup>

### **MILITARY FORCE AS THE ULTIMATE MEANS**

President Sadat’s overall strategy included the eventual use of force. His choice to use force was with “the aim of changing the existing political and military balance in the Middle East by undermining the basic concepts of the Israeli national security doctrine.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite the fact that Egyptian nationalism called for a military action, he first explored peaceful solutions. From the time he took office, he developed a strategic concept of operations, considering the risks and benefits of war, as well as the resources required to wage a war. Knowing the risks outweighed the benefits, and considering the fact he did not have adequate resources to fight a long war with Israel, Sadat pursued more viable options such as negotiating with the super-powers. For the most part, his assumptions about his friends and the enemy were correct. He correctly assumed the world had sufficient faith in his personality and character (peaceful and logical) to convince the Egyptian people not to fight another war with Israel. As Sadat recalled in September

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<sup>19</sup> Extensive interview with National War College International Fellow, Brigadier General Hamdy Bekhiet, Egypt (September 20, 2000)

<sup>20</sup> Hassan El Badri, Taha El Magdoub, and Mohammed Dia El Din Zohdy, “Decision and Concept,” in *The Ramadan War, 1973* (Dunn Loring, Va.: T.N. Dupuy Associates, Inc., 1978) 19

1973, “It had taken me many months—from January to September—to prepare the world for war”.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 239 Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 240

## WHEN CULTURES CLASH

On Yom Kippur, the high Jewish holy day, October 6, 1973—at precisely 2:05 P.M., Egypt and Syria jointly launched an attack on Israel. In close, fierce and bitter fighting, Egypt and Syria would almost achieve their military objectives. Approximately ninety thousand Egyptian troops, in coordination with Syria's thirty-five thousand troops and eight hundred tanks to complement Egypt's one thousand tanks, would initially overwhelm Israeli defenses along the length of the Suez Canal's east bank and neutralize Israeli military superiority—both on the ground against Israel's mobile armored units, and in the air through an intricate air defense system strung along the canal's east bank. However, within eight days of almost continual fighting, Egypt and Israel engaged in what has been attributed to be the largest armored battle since World War II.<sup>22</sup> With restored air superiority and rapidly replenished equipment streaming in an uninterrupted flow from the United States (ironically much of it via an Egyptian air field), Israel regained combat momentum and once again became dominant on the ground and in the air. Suffering enormous losses without timely replacements, Egypt could not deny Israel's advance and the eventual establishment of a beachhead across the canal and on Egypt's western flank. The military conflict had turned irreversibly in Israel's favor. At a decided cost to Israel, what Anwar Sadat could not immediately achieve through undisputed military victory, he would ultimately realize through third party negotiations. It is at this juncture of the October War narrative that necessitates a careful analysis of Sadat's overall military strategic, geo-political concept that initiated and guided his use of military force available to Sadat at that time. This analysis will be pursued through the

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<sup>22</sup> CQ Press, *The Middle East- Ninth Edition*, A division of Congressional Quarterly Inc. (Washington, DC:CQ Inc. 2000) 42

following questions: (1) What did Sadat perceive Israel's centers of gravity to be, and how did he plan to attack/influence them to achieve his political aims? (2) What were Sadat's underlying assumptions that determined Egypt's military objectives in support of political aims? (3) Finally, what was the type and nature of war to be waged, based upon his assessment of potential costs, benefits, and risks?

**“PRIDE GOES BEFORE DESTRUCTION ...”<sup>23</sup>**

Sadat's empathy for Egypt's sense of humiliation, reflected most dramatically in Syrian President Assad's October 6<sup>th</sup> speech concerning the “battle of honor and dignity,” was captured equally well in Sadat's emotional and psychological measurement of Israel. Just as the Arab world was deflated and shamed by the numerous Israeli military successes—particularly the debacle of 1967, Israel, Sadat surmised, was bloated with a sense of invulnerability and invincibility, leading to a relative military complacency. An enemy that is overly confident and self-assured can be surprised, stung and perhaps pulled off balance—if not totally overcome. Sadat further gambled that Israel's binary center of gravity could be shaken if its superior *military forces* could be rattled before the world stage, and Israel's *comfortable/reliable alliances and global prestige* could be undermined, if only temporarily.

Conversely, in the years immediately leading up to 1973—each year trumpeted as a “year of decision,” Sadat built upon and exploited his predecessor's sense of Egyptian nationalism and pan-Arab impatience with its territorial losses to Israel. Knowing that Egypt would engage in armed conflict against Israel with inferior equipment, both qualitatively and quantitatively, Sadat identified and relied upon a center of gravity for

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<sup>23</sup> (and) “... a haughty spirit before a fall.” Hebrew Scriptures: Proverbs 16:18 (New International Version of the Holy Bible)



Egypt that Israel could not easily destroy—the will to fight and die. “We knew we were fighting against (superior) technology ... *honor* was our center of gravity.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite Sadat’s frustration with the Soviet Union whose commitment to *détente* precluded the type of in-kind offensive military support needed by Egypt, the Egyptian President was able to craft a second, far-reaching center of gravity for Egypt that increased in intensity, scope and clarity within a fortnight of the outbreak of hostilities. This second, geo-political center of gravity was predicated on three primary initiatives: (1) Sadat’s willingness and insistence to negotiate directly and often with the United States, and his unflappable perseverance in this effort, first with Secretary of State Rogers, to be followed by Mr. Henry Kissinger. This nascent effort pioneered profound relief from the U.S. as this initially reluctant but soon-to-be pivotal American diplomatic involvement became a tangible/lasting influence. (2) Sadat’s political acumen enabled him to construct an albeit fragile yet growing sentimental support for Egypt, first among Arab states in the region; then, through UN’s increasing agitation with Israel—reflecting the pressure of world opinion—in combination with a serendipitous development of what has been marked as the first successful use of oil as a political weapon in the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>25</sup> As noted earlier, the oil producing Arab countries maintained an embargo on oil exports to Western, oil-thirsty nations friendly to Israel, thereby causing gasoline shortages and inflated oil prices—a negative effect not taken lightly by the U.S. economy. (3) Sadat’s openness to shift allegiance from the Soviet Union to the United

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<sup>24</sup> Extensive interview with NWC International Fellow, BG Hamdy Bekhiet, Egypt (September 20, 2000): General Hamdy continued, “.... in our doctrine (for this war), we didn’t think about (personnel) casualties. Honor came first. Casualties were secondary.” General Hamdy served in the grade of 1<sup>st</sup> Lt as a reconnaissance officer—having been placed behind enemy lines several days prior to D-day; and serving until wounded in combat one week after the Egyptian crossing of the Suez Canal.

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth W. Stein, *Arab-Israeli War of 1973*, Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2000 (September 5, 2000) 3

States, signaled a very different posture and attitude toward Israel. Sadat's triangulation with the Soviets and Americans underscored a limited war aim to "free the land" (as noted earlier in this essay, to include the original Arab territories occupied prior to 1967) and not to annihilate Israel in a total war by means of attrition. These limited aims signaled a reduction of the specter of super-power confrontation within the region.

The domestic situations and political developments within both the Soviet Union and the United States (such as America's Jewish lobby of concern to President Nixon), and their conjoint pursuit of *détente*, cannot be emphasized enough in that all parties, to include Israel, seemingly underestimated the moral resolve of both Sadat and his people to wage what most surely would result in yet another costly military conflagration. Were the risks worth the projected costs? Could the aim justify the expenditure of seemingly inadequate and finite means? These questions lead to the next major consideration of President Sadat's underlying assumptions contributing to the articulation of his military objectives.

### **"ALL WARFARE IS BASED ON DECEPTION"<sup>26</sup>**

Carl von Clausewitz wrote, "When whole communities go to war—whole peoples, and especially civilized peoples—the reason always lies in some political situation, and the occasion is always due to some political object. War, therefore, is an act of policy."<sup>27</sup>

Without question, Sadat never lost sight of his chief political aim: to use military action to force renewed, effective diplomatic resolve of territorial disputes favorable to Egypt. His political aim was transparent and made credible through his numerous, though heretofore unsuccessful attempts at diplomacy via the UN in general, and with the two

<sup>26</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) 66

<sup>27</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard & Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967) 87. In further elaboration, Clausewitz wrote, "The political object is the goal, war

super-powers in particular. Only when the international community either ignored or delayed action on his requests—and with mounting internal pressure on the Egyptian home front, did he, with careful, quiet diligence and uncanny astuteness begin to develop Egypt's war plans that necessarily were grounded in duplicity of intentions as to the timing of attack and functional surprise of the enemy.

President Sadat's assumptions both prompted and also confounded the task before him. Many of the major factors were a two-edged sword in Sadat's calculations: (1) Egyptian domestic unrest and impatience demanded that something be done against Israel—in the name of nationalism and Egyptian pride. However, Sadat had the prickly task of both exploiting this growing clamor for justice and, at the same time, not be overcome with the emotional fervor that could result in costly, premature hostilities before Egypt's army was completely ready. (2) Distinct from, but closely connected with the passionate state of the Egyptian people, was to prepare, equip and train the Egyptian armed forces in such a *sub rosa* manner that could both mobilize and focus this passion, as General Hamdy Bekhiet so eloquently described, and to exploit the Israeli defenses through the calculus of surprise, speed and convincing lethality. Sadat's assumption was that the harnessed passion of his military forces must compensate for their comparative disadvantage in overall, sustained military strength. (3) Finally, Sadat believed that the longer the war, the less favorable would be the outcome. In concert with Clausewitz' subjugation of military objectives to political aims, Sadat's diplomatic efforts would now be expressed through military action—but always subservient to the overall political aim. Therefore, the initial military thrust must be convincing, to Israel, to potential Arab-nation alliances, to the

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is a means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose ... policy, then, will permeate all military operations.” (87)

Soviets and Americans—and to the people of Egypt. National honor, political credibility and regional peace were at stake. Each audience, mentioned above, was important.

Timing was everything: when to begin hostilities, and when to negotiate for a cease-fire and a satisfactory peace.

### **OLD ENEMIES AND LUKEWARM FRIENDS<sup>28</sup>**

Machiavelli's prophetic utterance underscores Sadat's dilemma in his construction of the type and kind of war to be waged, based upon his assessment of costs versus risks. This question is at the heart of national security strategy.<sup>29</sup> The essence of Anwar Sadat's challenge was to renew and conduct statecraft from a position of strength. That strength could only be realized through a coherent and comprehensive approach to war that was clearly an attempt to change the "old order" or the paradigm that insisted Israel always wins. Egypt's national interest of restored dignity was intricately linked to restoration of lost territory. The political context at home reflected increasing despair and disgust; an unwieldy position for a head of state. Egypt's power and influence as a client-state of the Soviet Union were waning and could only become weaker with the passage of time and a continuance of the status quo. Despite Egypt's tenuous, almost non-existent relationship with the United States, there seemed to be a small window of opportunity present, even if the window had to be jarred open a bit wider. Forcing the window of opportunity required a calculated risk—for at least three years in the making.

It seemed to be a prudent time to act: Israel was weary with sudden mobilizations; the

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<sup>28</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Luigi Ricci & ed. Christian Gauss (A Mentor Book, 1980) 49-50. Full quote: "It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order, this lukewarmness arising partly from fear of their adversaries, who have the laws in their favor; and partly from the incredulity of mankind, who do not truly believe in anything new until they have had actual experience of it."

<sup>29</sup> Dr. Terry L. Deibel Lecture Seminar (T-1-8): September 6, 2000

U.S. and USSR were dancing to *détente*; Arabs were dancing to nationalism, fueled by a revived and unpredictable Islamism.

Sadat's war plans were not conceived in a vacuum. As noted earlier, Egypt's entire armed forces contributed to their development with the primary aim to "challenge the Israeli theory of 'security' with military action to the capabilities of our armed forces, with the purpose of inflicting the greatest losses possible, to persuade the enemy that a continued occupation of our land would be more costly than it can afford ... and to demonstrate that a security based on psychological, political, and military intimidation is precarious and will not provide protection either now or in the future."<sup>30</sup> In spite of a glaring tactical mistake in the midst of Egypt's forward momentum, permitting Israel's ground forces time to re-supply and its air power to regain general control of the air, the shock of Egypt's early military successes prompted the "Save Israel" pleas and generated renewed, intense and determined (shuttle) diplomacy, with the United States taking the lead in these efforts, just as Sadat had envisioned. Tactically speaking, the offensive-defensive plan was properly conceived, but clumsily executed.

Nevertheless, this hoped-for "shock" as described by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger<sup>31</sup> jolted negotiations into a pace and direction that ultimately would benefit Egypt.

The benefits that were to accrue to Mr. Sadat and his people were of a short-term and long-term nature. Sadat's military boldness immediately mobilized surrounding Arab states to participate, albeit nominally for the most part, in this galvanizing pan-Arab quest. This is reflected in the Arab coalition that introduced the oil embargo mentioned

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<sup>30</sup> Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) 189

<sup>31</sup> Henry Kissinger, "Why We Were Surprised," *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, Inc. 1982) 460

earlier. President Sadat, in the first week of armed conflict, could address his own people from a victorious if somewhat tenuous position—bolstering his status as well as lifting the spirits and restoring pride to the Egyptian people. The images and reputation of Israel as forever vigilant and invincible were tarnished if not outright shattered—ultimately bringing down its own political (Golda Meir) and military (Moshe Dayan) leaders. This short-term gain would attain a long-term value as well. The distinct reduction of USSR's influence in the region and its loss of Egypt as its primary client ensued. In a zero-sum game of the U.S. strategy of containment, this opportunity could not and would not be fumbled by the U.S.

The strategic and tactical surprise wrought by Anwar Sadat's Egypt in The October War brought enduring long-term dividends to Egypt, to the region and to the balance of power equation in the Middle East. Egypt's initiative sought and achieved a limited political aim through the use of limited objectives in a manner that coaxed the principal parties back to serious and productive negotiations that began with the on-again-off-again cease fire, a series of UN resolutions leading to the U.S.-brokered Camp David Accords in 1978 and a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979. It is indeed difficult to conclude that an intransigent and smug Israel, and the somewhat distracted super-powers would have been brought to serious negotiations without Egypt's brief but lethal military coercion.

In conclusion, one of the more compelling aspects of President Sadat's leadership prior to, during and following The October War was his ability to maintain clear political objectives with each decision that he made in the face of anticipated and unpredictable developments and turns-of-events. It is a

study in and confirmation of Clausewitz' "fascinating trinity" inferred earlier in this essay.<sup>32</sup> It is therefore appropriate to end at the beginning. There is a profound confluence and interplay between and among passion, reason and uncertainty. President Sadat, permeated in passions and memories of wars lost, humiliations suffered, national unrest prevalent, was yet able to sublimate and actually harness much of the irrational foment to rational, objective ends. The October War did not degenerate into a protracted vendetta against Israel and/or an unreasoned attack against Western powers.

Sadly, Sadat's vision to overcome the Arab-Israeli impasse that led to his dramatic visit to Israel in October 1977 overstepped the bounds of what his own country could tolerate—leading to his assassination in 1981.<sup>33</sup> Riding the tiger of nationalism ultimately wrought his own undoing, but not before Egypt was restored some measure of self-respect and not before it was inexorably tilted toward the West.

It surely can be argued that nationalism in the Middle East, intensified by Islamic fervor, was at the root of the history of the cycle of violence in that region. However, for a time, Sadat was able to finesse its force to Egypt's advantage as nationalism became a rallying *shibboleth* that would not only appease, but also unify the pan-Arab masses. Sadat achieved a temporary reprieve from *sharshaha* (shameful weakness) as coined by the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani.<sup>34</sup> Regrettably, the force of nationalism has a longer memory

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<sup>32</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard & Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967) 89

<sup>33</sup> Phebe Marr, "Why Focus on Egypt?" ed. Marr, *Egypt at the Crossroads* (Nat'l Defense University Press: WASH DC, 1999) xviii

than do victory speeches, where little patience is exhibited for seemingly intractable peace negotiations and centuries-long feuds—leading to Sadat’s untimely demise.

Additionally, the dynamic of “chance and probability” asserts itself throughout this war. Sadat, alone, seemed capable of mining opportunities, however obscure at the time, in pursuit of his single-minded focus of forcing Israel back to the negotiations table. Much is spoken of Egypt’s honor and dignity, and its quest to restore it. But Sadat did not permit foolish pride nor Arab nationalism to side-track his seeking leverage wherever he could; through neighboring Arab states or through a sometimes reluctant and unreliable USSR; or with Israel’s symbiotic partner in the USA. Sadat was able to effectively pierce the fog of war during the Jewish Yom Kippur and the Islamic Ramadan—each religious season relegated in importance to Anwar Sadat’s quest for justice as he understood it in behalf of Egypt’s honor.

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<sup>34</sup> Muhammad Muslih, “Palestinian and Other Arab Perspectives on the Peace Process,” *The Middle East and the Peace Process*, ed. Robert O. Freedman (University of Florida: 1998) 81